Episode 104: Deborah Loewenberg Ball

# KL: Katie Linder

# DLB: Deborah Loewenberg Ball

# KL: You’re listening to “Research in Action”: episode one hundred and four.

# [intro music]

# Segment 1:

# KL: Welcome to “Research in Action,” a weekly podcast where you can hear about topics and issues related to research in higher education from experts across a range of disciplines. I’m your host, Dr. Katie Linder, director of research at Oregon State University Ecampus. Along with every episode, we post show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, full transcript, and an instructor guide for incorporating the episode into your courses. Check out the shows website at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast to find all of these resources.

On today’s episode, I'm joined by Dr. Deborah Loewenberg Ball, the William H. Payne Collegiate Professor of education at the University of Michigan, an Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, and the director of TeachingWorks. She taught elementary school for more than 15 years, and continues to teach mathematics to elementary students every summer. Dr. Ball studies the practice of teaching, seeking to identify how its power can be leveraged to disrupt racism, marginalization, and inequity. Much of her research focuses on elementary mathematics as a critical context for understanding teaching practice, examining the endemic challenges of working across difference, and the relational, communicative, and content-understanding entailments of that work. Her current work centers on ways to improve the quality of beginning teaching, particularly for children of color and low-income children. Dr. Ball has authored or co-authored more than 150 publications and has lectured and made numerous major presentations around the world. She serves on the National Science Board and the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute Board of Trustees and is president of the American Educational Research Association. Ball has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Education, and is a fellow of the American Mathematical Society and the American Educational Research Association.

Thanks for joining me, Deborah.

**DLB:** It’s a pleasure

**KL:** So, I know looking through your bio that a bunch of your research has focused on math education, and I would love to hear a little bit more about your pathway into this field. What lead you to work in this area?

**DLB:** So I spent a lot of my early career as an elementary school teacher, and my focus wasn’t particularly in mathematics at all, In fact, I majored in French in college, and I was teaching in all subjects – like most elementary teachers and math was the subject that, after about five years of teaching, I found myself the most perplexed by. I found that although I was trying to teach really carefully, and trying to make sure everything made sense to my children – to my students – I often forgot mathematical ideas and procedures as fast as I could teach it to them. And it made me really puzzled about what it was I was doing or what I might need to learn, in order to not see that happen. I felt as though the other subjects I was teaching, I was getting better at as I got more experienced, but with math – something wasn’t right. And so I began a process of really trying to focus on my math teaching, and one of the things I did was consider that maybe I myself needed to understand math more. That didn’t really strike me as the problem, but I thought maybe that might be a good idea. So I began to study more math as one of the things that, and one thing that I noticed as I began to take college level mathematics – topics I hadn’t really studied before – It wasn’t so much that I was teaching those topics to children, in fact at that point I was teaching first grade, so taking calculus didn’t seem immediately to have that much to do with what I was teaching, but I quickly discovered that it did have something to do with it in the sense that I began to notice things that my children were saying and thinking about that were really profound, that I realized I had been missing all along. I also began to understand better sort of what math really might be, and what kinds of things might be construed as mathematical, that enabled me to do work with my kids in class. So for example, I began to see it as much more important to encourage them to be making conjectures about things that they noticed, and I discovered that they were already doing that. For example, I had heard them saying that if you add an odd number with an odd number, it seemed to always be an even number – and I don’t know that I had always recognized that was a big deal for 6 year olds to see something like that. Or I noticed that they had ideas about even numbers, some of which weren’t quite right, and I wouldn’t have been able to notice that. The way the curriculum teaches numbers, kind of produced the ideas they had that weren’t right. For example, they would think that any number, if you split it into two parts, would be even, but by then I began to realize that’s not completely right, you can take 7 and divide it into two parts and it’s not even. So I became more tuned to listening to both what they were saying and what they were thinking about. So although what I was studying at the university level wasn’t directly what I was teaching, it changed my ability to hear, and my ability to notice and be much more attuned to my children. So from there, although I continued to be a full time elementary school teacher, that began a pathway where I was especially interested in the kind of challenge of teaching math well to pretty young students. And I taught over the years, every grade from first to fifth grade – I never taught kindergarten and I never taught middle school. So while I was thinking more about math and elementary children, I was teaching different grade levels, and so over those years I had opportunities to think about kids of different ages and what that had to do with math. But I didn’t become a math teacher, I think some people think I’m a math specialist – I’m not really. It’s just that I became really fascinated with the challenge of trying to teach math in a way that was really accessible and made it a real human enterprise that children could tune into the way we thought about literature or science or other fields where kids do things and you can see it, but with math that somehow seemed more difficult.

**KL:** I think math is such an interesting thing, because so many people have such a block with it. They feel like they’re not a math person, or maybe they were told in early days – and this is kind of leaning toward Carol Dweck’s work of mindset – that if you’re told really early on that you’re not a math person, you think that you just can’t do it. Um but I’m also really interested in the fact that you leaned toward the challenge rather then, you know, you had these other things that were going pretty well, and you didn’t lean in that direction. You were like, “Well here’s the thing, and it’s hard. Let me try to figure that out and figure out what’s going on here.” And I find that really fascinating. And because your whole career is sort of focused on this field, I’m wondering if you can talk about how the field of math education has changed from when you first started looking at it to now. Have you seen certain kinds of trends or shifts in the field?

**DLB:** I think around that time, so this is, we’re talking the early 1980’s, at the point I became really interested in early math teaching, there was a big growth in the field of research on teaching overall, and on math in particular, to focus on children’s conceptions in lots of fields –in science, in reading text literacy and in math – often focused on misconceptions like producing research that showed that children typically had ways of thinking that were not right, and resistant to instruction. Some of the best examples were in science, where you know, for example, some colleagues of mine at Michigan State discovered that children tended to have really predictable ideas about how plants make their own food that really weren’t very scientifically correct, but made a lot of sense, so they did a lot of research about how do you intervene on the kinds of conceptions that kids develop? As a teacher I always found that both helpful and unhelpful in some ways, because what I was finding is that children thought about really productive things that we as adults are not hearing and are missing. So focusing it all on error, was something that was not particularly fully attractive to me. Math is already a subject where people tend to mostly think about what you don’t have right, and so as a teacher I was trying to understand what children do know, as well as where they might be thinking things that do make sense, but also aren’t necessarily quite right, and there’s a lot of research on kids thinking in the 1980s. I think then, you know, we saw the rise of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, producing standards for curriculum, and for teaching and for assessment in the late 80s and 90s, so a lot of the fields began to turn to questions about, what does really good math curriculum look like? And there was a big focus for at least a decade on improving math curriculum. That didn’t have as much influence on me in some ways, even though that was important, simply because I had been lucky enough to work in a school district where we had a few different sets of curriculum materials that we were able to use, and I learned a lot from some of those curriculum. So I did think learning to build really good mathematical tasks were important, and researchers spent quite a lot of time thinking about that, and I found that interesting and usefully complimentary to my work as a teacher. What I did find was the field of mathematics education, wasn’t always working on teaching itself, andbecause I was a teacher and gradually became a teacher educator as well, I yearned for there to be more research on teaching. And I think that as the 1990’s closed and we turned toward, you know, the last 15 or 17 years, you begin to see people doing more research on classrooms, on teaching practices. For example, the work that Paul Cobb and his colleagues did over many years that looked at how teachers actually built out norms in a classroom and patterns of discussion. There are lots of researchers that began to look at discourse in classrooms – I found that really important to my work as a teacher and as a teacher educator – to not look only at, what do kids think or what math should we be teaching in and in what ways, but how actually do you teach, how do you run a classroom with children who are different from each other very likely and from you? How do you build that so that it’s a context where they feel successful, and like what you said a little while ago, where children don’t develop or have reinforced the notion that you’re not a math person. You want an environment where you do feel like math is an entitlement, and you can do it. Um I would say that one of the things was that I always taught in a school, and even now – in my teaching of children now, I pretty much always taught in situations where I taught children of color and I taught children in my full time teaching experience who were English language learners. And I found it somewhat frustrating that it was not always easy to find research that directly made it explicit who the children were. It was almost as if the children were – it was almost a color blindness, where a lot of work just described children of a particular age, but you didn’t know much about who the children were or what context they lived in. And as a teacher, it matters a lot that you’re tuned into what children know from their actual environment, what they bring, what their culture and their community equips them with. And there certainly was a work in general in the field on culturally relevant pedagogy, and other forms of teaching research that was focused on culture, but I didn’t see a huge intersection always between math education and the specifics of the cultures, and language, and ethnicities of children, and because I taught in an environment where that was always at the front of my mind, I wanted there to be more work of that type – and there is more work. More researchers are looking more specifically at questions of diversity, of equity and how that relates both to math, and to teaching practices, and to classrooms, and to context. And I think that is where the field needs to spend even more time, but we’re also understanding better how the identity of the teacher interacts with who the children are, and what that means for what teachers have to do, can do, can learn to do, and so on.

**KL:** So this theme of your work Deborah, about kind of disrupting production of inequality, and really focusing on different issues of diversity and inclusion, uh I know this has been kind of an area of focus for your research, and I’m wondering what you’ve learned about actionable steps that researchers can take to disrupt the production of inequality in math education. Are there particular things that you think are focus areas for teachers that are trying to, you know, make sure that this is not happening?

**DLB:** I think one thing that – my colleagues and I are finding particularly useful, and I think it builds on quite a lot of other work that’s out there – work by Gloria Ladson Billings and many others who have been looking at questions of social justice and equity is becoming much more conscious of the ways in which some patterns in classrooms tend to reinforce hierarchies of status or privilege, that means you’re reinforcing the same patterns of who gets included in mathematics and who’s not. So one of the practices from one set are pretty obvious – like disciplinary practices where teachers are being quite severe in their disciplinary practices, perhaps in context where their being pressured quite a lot to make sure that classrooms are orderly. You can see patterns where children – and often its black boys or its children of color more generally who are being disciplined in ways that they aren’t even inside of the instruction at all, and then we’re surprised that children might not have the opportunity to learn. Those are somewhat egregious examples, and they’re really important. But other examples are one’s where there are practices that we’ve come to assume are actually good, where it’s useful to understand that those practices may not always be as good as they look, and we need to be more aware of how particular ways of thinking might serve to reinforce marginalization than to work against it. So an example of that might be, what are different ways that we can work to assure that children have opportunities to have their ideas be foregrounded in class, let’s say during a math discussion, so that lots of practices that we help teachers to learn, that we could take for granted and not think about closely enough – things like a child shares an idea and everyone is asked to agree or disagree. Um that can be a really useful practice, but if you think about it, if that’s the first step after a child shares his or her idea, that can be a process by which a child that already feels marginalized or is part of a marginalized group, immediately has many different children disagreeing and that actually can reinforce a sense of marginalization. So we’ve been practicing about and studying, what are some of the moves that teachers can make, that intervene on patterns that might just reproduce those same patterns. So for example, is it useful sometimes to help a child talk at the board, and support that child’s continue to hold the floor, so that child and her ideas or his ideas are being featured? And when you combine that with thinking actively about questions of gender, questions of race. You can be much more deliberate as a teacher to think, “How am I actually deliberately changing patterns that have persisted in classrooms?” Another whole line of work that’s also important is the mathematics. What we’re signaling to the kids about who makes mathematics – what are the images of who mathematicians are? What are the context of the math problems that we use? And when one isn’t critical of those, you end up doing things that inadvertently can really reinforce both racism, and sexism, and other forms of bias – so in a lot of math textbooks, there’s a really strong class bias, where a lot of the problems probably make more sense if you’re middle class, and might actually be pretty alienating if you’re not. Uh, problems about taking vacations, problems about things having to do with pets – that might not be the experience of children living in other environments, and don’t therefore take up the ways in which mathematical confidence shows up very actively in the environments that are not so middle class. So being more deliberate about that, and thinking about what the resources are that children have where mathematics get used – I mean, be more attentive about the math problems. And similarly, without care, one could easily – for pretty obvious reasons keep showing kids images of white men as mathematician which doesn’t produce a way of kids identifying themselves as people who maybe do want to be mathematicians or don’t, but see themselves as part of the creation in that field. So there are many places where I think the big picture is about learning to be much more conscious of all of these ways in which we constantly reproduce similar patterns of exclusion in mathematics, and when you work against those, and even in other small ways, those things can add up to very different experiences for children. And so I think both our own research, but also the research of many people in the field is pointed to real specific ways which people can act, rather than simply believe that all kids can learn it. It’s not about that all kids can learn it, it’s about, like, what do you do to ensure you’re attending to who’s talking in your class, who’s getting opportunities, how are you making sure that you’re not reinforcing the same patterns that have always existed?

**KL:** Deborah, I feel like you’re just unpeeling all of these layers and layers of this onion – of the complexity of all of the different things that go into this, and the examples that you’re providing are so concrete and helpful. We’re going to take a brief break. When we come back we’re going to hear a little bit more from Deborah about her work with TeachingWorks. Back in a moment.

The Research in Action podcast is one of the many projects we work on here at the Oregon State University Ecampus Research Unit. A project I am particularly excited about is our OSU Ecampus Researcher Fellows program, which funds research for Oregon State faculty, that is actionable, impacts student learning online, and encourages the development of a robust research pipeline on online teaching and learning at OSU. Recently our first cohort released a series of white papers on methods and designs for distance education research. See the white papers at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/white-papers.

# Segment 2:

**KL:** Deborah, TeachingWorks is one of the larger projects that you’ve worked on, I’m wondering if you can describe what it is for our listeners who might not be so familiar with it.

**DLB:** Sure, teaching works is an organization at the University of Michigan that works primarily with organizations and programs all around the country, and even some outside of the United States, and our mission is to raise the quality of beginning teaching in this country. So to put it simply, every year teachers enter the classroom and for lots of reasons that we can talk about, many of them aren’t really prepared for that work well enough and here I mean for a whole variety of different reasons and different pathways, they’re not actually ready for the school work that they face with teaching children. And this is a very big problem, because it’s not exactly as though those beginning teachers are distributed randomly in our country, it’s much more likely that there’s a constant turnover of new teachers in urban school systems, in school systems that have large concentrations of black and brown children, and low income children. So when you put this together, you see a pattern in which teachers who aren’t really ready to take on the responsibility of children’s learning and flourishing, aren’t really in a position of suddenly doing this very difficult work with children who really do good teaching, and these children are getting over and over again every year, teachers who are new to the classroom, so our mission is to change that. And to ensure that children in this country, particularly children I’ve been talking about and the children I have, when they encounter teachers each fall, that they’re getting teachers who actually prepared enough to be responsible for their learning, so it’s actually a very serious question. If someone is a first year teacher, and doesn’t yet know very much about what it takes to help a six year old learn to read, and there are six year olds in that class who don’t learn how to read, that has a catastrophic effect on those children. What happens to children who don’t learn to read early in school is that they’re far more likely to do poorly throughout school and not even complete high school. I mean, the data are really, really compelling. So what we do is we define a set of high leverage teaching practices that are, you know, the things that teachers do every day, that are really crucial for children’s opportunities, that are things that beginning teachers can be helped to learn to do confidently, and that really matter for children’s well-being, and we’ve identified a set of these. We also worked on ways those can be actually taught to beginning teachers. So it isn’t that you read about how to lead a discussion – the high level practices, but we’ve been able to take apart some of the elements of leading a discussion, we built on the work of Pam Grossman and other people in the field about how you decompose or take apart something complex in teaching, so that you can learn it in parts and begin to reassemble it. And we developed ways of using video, of using rehearsal, of being able to simulate – being able to do things in real classrooms with children, and how you organize all of that clinical practice, so that you’re not only isolating the key things that beginning teachers need to know how to do, but ensuring that the way we teach them really help them to do those things. We also work on assessments that can be used within teacher preparation programs or by school districts to assess the capabilities of a beginning teach to do these practices, and we work with policy makers to try to get states to be more demanding that people should not get teaching licenses or be permitted to begin teaching, when they don’t have this sort of begging level of capability, and currently we don’t do that in this country. So what TeachingWorks does in a practical sense, is partner with other organizations and other programs and provide different levels of support, collaboration to assist them in developing the curriculum that they use in preparing teachers and the ways they assess them, so that through multiple programs, and multiple pathways in our programs, we can ensure our goal of making sure teachers in our country are prepared well enough to take on the responsibility that they are signing up to take on.

**KL:** Okay, this sounds like a huge job that you’re taking on with TeachingWorks, and I have to say, Deborah, you know, I have a background in faculty developing, so this is kind of thinking about professional development for teachers at a higher education level. And one of the things that we’ve always been challenged by in faculty development is making a direct connection between what we are asking our faculty to do, and how it may or may not be impacting the learning that’s happening in the classroom, because you’re always just kind of one step removed from that metric of measurement. And I’m wondering, you know, through this role you have directing TeachingWorks, what have you learned about professional development for teachers? You know, like how are you kind of getting past that challenge of, if you’re one step removed from the direct measurement of the effectiveness, how are you kind of thinking through how to help teachers teach better?

**DLB:** Well there are a couple things to consider here, on is that the practices that we have identified as being crucial are ones that research on learning and research on teaching have helped us understand our fundamental to student learning. So for example, one of the high leverage practices is being able to elicit and determine student thinking, and it’s really clear that research on teaching shows us - and research on learning – that when teachers aren’t aware in the ways of which student are understanding the material, they far less likely to target their instruction in a ways that connect with what students already know and can do, as well as addressing things that students might be having difficulty with. So the practices we pick come directly out of research on learning and teaching. Some of the practices are themselves about assessment – so connecting teaching and tool learning. We find that instructors at every level, teachers and post-secondary instructors, can use more and more skill at what are the ways you can at on-going basis – monitor and check in with the ways that students are responding to instruction. So that includes things one does during a particular class period, things one does intermittently. How to calibrate teaching practices in such a way so that it is always connected to what you’re calling one-step removed – is connected to student learning. That is what teaching is supposed to do, and so you don’t want to be teaching teaching practices that somehow are completely removed from the students. They have to be about – how do you find out what your students know? How do you explain things in ways that make sense to your students? How do you check in to see whether they’re following what you’re doing? What does it look like to design tasks that actually help students to engage in the material? So we try as much as we can to make sure that what we work on, is actually about the students in those teachers’ class rooms. I think we’ve also learned that being much more deliberate about the specificity of what we work on is important, that it’s really different to work on what teachers know or what they believe, then it is to know what they practice, and those things are of course connected depends on understanding the mathematics in every nuance ways, and much more flexible ways, and you need to know if you’re not teaching, but also it means being able to ask really good mathematical questions of the student that you ask, so that’s like combing teaching practice with content knowledge. And for teachers to get better at asking good questions in class, they need practice. So you can’t just read the questioning matters, or read about the types of the questions, you need opportunities to design the questions, to try asking them with the right tone of voice, to get feedback, to try asking the real students. So the clinical component of how over time teachers are supported to practice and get feedback really matters, and it doesn’t mean always immediately practicing with real kids. Simulations are turning out to be important in all professions, and we’re learning a lot about how simulations as a form of practice are important for students too. We’re learning a lot more about doing run through of various kinds can help teachers get ready. For example, if you’re going to lead a complex discussion about a text, it’s really helpful to lead that discussion perhaps with one of your colleagues first, just to see what are some of the moves you’re going to make, how are you going to make sure you’re steering toward some of the material you want to try to develop in the discussion – whereas if you just plant a set of goals and go off and have the discussion, even if you learned more about the features of a good discussion, it’s very unlikely that you’re discussions will get better. So unfortunately what we’re learning is that – well on the good side, teaching is something that you can’t teach people to do, and it’s learnable, but on the other hand it doesn’t just come one by hearing a few good ideas about what to do, and then going off on your own setting. So we in fact have to take more seriously that teaching is, as you said, very complex and learning to do it requires ongoing support and opportunities to learn particular things, and to try them out, and to go through cycles of trying out – seeing yourself on video tape, getting feedback, trying again, and so on.

**KL:** One of the things I really love about how you’re describing this, Deborah is that, you know, teaching is a profession, but it’s also a craft, and it’s not something that you learn and then stop learning about. You know, like, what you’re emplacing here is that this is a constant – there’s a constant need for practice to make sure that you really understand what you’re doing, or standing up with new techniques, but also just that you’re kind of getting a deep understanding of what the kind of core components of what makes an effective teacher.

**DLB:** Right, and I think the resistance to thinking of teaching as something that’s – whether you want to call it a craft, or you want to refer to it as technique, is that strange cultural resistance to that, both within the profession and more broadly, it’s kind of strange when you think about it because there aren’t other skilled professions. Like, take for example, nurse midwives or social workers, or other professions that you can imagine. Also including things such as skilled trades, like hairdressers for example. In all of those cases, we acknowledge that there’s a fair amount of judgment that’s contextual, that’s oriented toward the particulars of the client or the user, you understand that you have to have a repertoire of moves, but nobody in those other fields thinks that you just make it up on your own and it’s all completely idiosyncratic. And yet, one of the challenges that we face when we try to describe teaching as something that has to be learned, and can be broken down and practiced, the immediate redaction by many people is that, “Oh, you’re making it a skilled profession” when in fact we’re doing the opposite. We’re trying to honor the fact that it’s complex, and that it involves a high level of skilled judgement, care knowledge, and that one just doesn’t learn that by chance. And in fact in this country, we have for too long allowed that to be something that people do just learn by chance – with very grave consequences for children and for students.

**KL:** I could not agree more. I think you’re absolutely right. I’m wondering, Deborah, what’s next for TeachingWorks?

**BLB:** Well teaching works has to continue thinking about how we work with a greater range of organizations in parts of the country, and to acknowledge that on one hand, we have experience and resources to bring to it, but we also never want to give the impression that we’re simply an exporting agency where we already know everything and we’re just trying to get people to implement. And yet if we go too far toward thinking that we’re always collaborating with everyone, then it can end up just being mush. So we do have ideas of what we think it would look like to improve the quality of teaching, but finding a balance between collaboration and learning from the new partners we form – new partnerships we form, but also bringing to bear what we’re learning literately over time from the different partnerships we’ve had – it’s a challenge. I think the other challenge is to consider whether how, and whether we worked in settings that are not so obviously teacher education. So for example, we’ve recently begun partnerships with some large school districts. You could understand, in fact, that school districts are the primary agents for creating the basic teaching force, because the beginning teachers are people who get hired by school districts, and by the decisions they make about who they hire and how they support them. School districts have a huge role and a huge investment in the beginning teaching force. So we’ve begun exploring how the partnerships between TeachingWorks and school districts might work to benefit the quality of beginning teaching, and we see this as a particularly promising line of work for us. The third thing that we really need to worry about is that we’ve built a set of performance based licensure assessment, that are extremely different from any other form of licensure assessment that we’ve used for teaching in this country before. And it isn’t a clear pathway from the development of assessment for this type to policy makers who would decide that in particular states that that’s what you would have to pass in order to get a teaching license. So the work involved in influencing policy to switch from an essentially knowledge based and reflection based approach to licensing teachers, to one that has more to do with practice, isn’t a simple one, and it’s one in which we’re very heavily engaged right now in exploring relationships with particular states, and locating different states that may be ready to try a more performance based – practice oriented approach to trying licensure.

**KL:** Well Deborah, your plate is incredibly full. I think this work is so crucial and important and I want to thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing about all of the different kind of endeavors that you’re working on both in your research but also in TeachingWorks. Thank you so much!

**DLB:** My pleasure. I’m really glad to have been invited to do it. Thank you, Katie.

**KL:** And thanks also to our listeners for joining us on this week’s episode of Research in Action. I’m Katie Linder, and we’ll be back next week with a new episode.

# Show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, a full transcript, and an instructor’s guide for incorporating the episode into your courses, can be found at the show’s website at [ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast](http://www.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast).

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# Bonus Clip:

**KL:** In episode 104 of the Research in Action podcast, Deborah Loewenberg Ball shares about the thing that is still keeping her up at night regarding her research. Take a listen!

**KL:** Deborah, you have had such a prestigious career – you’ve had so much research, you have seen so many kinds of trends and patterns overtime. I’m wondering kind of how all that collimates for you. Is there kind of a larger umbrella thing, you know, that you think about related to these issues? I mean, you’re working in a lot of really deep subjects, and I’m wondering, you know, what is that place that – as you’re in this sort of mature place in your career, that problem or issue that you’re still kind of chewing on and trying to figure out.

DLB: Yeah. I think it’s interesting that the thing that most preoccupies me when I sit quietly and think about where we are, is where I started. I started as an elementary school teacher, and very quickly began to realize what a profound job that was. And what incredible power one has a teacher, in a good sense that you’re helping to grow human beings, you know? Although children don’t spend all of their time at school, school is the social institution that we organize to help control student’s growth and I felt this profound sense of responsibility and amazement at it. It was just so fascinating. But I also quickly began to realize just by reading records on children and talking to other educators, that teachers also have the power to do great damage. That even one hurtful experience with a teacher can sometimes really turn a child off to a subject, or make the child feel inadequate. Many people have memories of those kinds of embarrassing, or humiliating, or even worse moments with teachers. So I was really impressed initially with the responsibility I was taking on with this work, and how much I found it interesting. But I also realized that it wasn’t a really respected profession. I can remember many times, and still happens to me that people are a little bit surprised that I’m as dedicated as an elementary teacher, that I find it such an important job. So when I stand back from that, and reflect a little bit on what I notice, around me in our country, now and certainly over my lifetime, I realize that teaching is the only social institution we organize to touch every single human being growing up in our country, and there’s so much more we could be doing to be deliberate about ensuring that the people who take on that responsibility have the support and respect that they need to really grow the work, because it has everything to do with the next generation of Americans. Um and when we leave that to chance, it’s really profoundly immoral. And I find myself finding this really difficult to understand, because if one wanted to set out to organize a system by which we would ensure that all young people growing up in this country, not only have the chance to become the individual adults that they dream of being, but that they would become part of a fabric of society in which people respect difference, where we live with the diversity, that actually could be an incredible resource, but really hasn’t been very often. Teaching would be the source that we already have to do that, but if we had to reinvent that, what would we invent? I find myself, and this may sound a little silly – sometimes when I see a politician or some other person doing something really ridiculous – behaving in a ridiculous way, saying something that seems really – so uninformed, I find myself saying to myself, “Who is their third grade teacher?” you know, does that person need to say to them like, wait - this is not a way that you think about talking to other people? What you said just makes no sense in terms of being respectful to other people. But it’s not really a silly thought. It’s that teaching is a hugely popular social enterprise, and we neglect it. We don’t take it seriously. We treat people who choose teaching as choosing a not very valued job, I know that my students who chose teaching, repeatedly tell me that their families despair the fact that they’re choosing to become teachers. This is all very strange when you think about it, when in fact it is the only occupation that has the most to do with the chances we have as a country – to become the kind of country we have the potential of being, but really haven’t managed to create. So that’s what keeps me up at night - and If I had a mission it would be to get more people to understand each of our roles in changing the way that teaching is regarded in our country, and the way in which it’s leverage to actually create the country and the society that we would like to be in this century.

**KL:** Deborah, now you’ve given me something that’s going to keep me up at night I think. I’ll think about this. Thank you so much for sharing your vision.

**DLB:** Thank you. Thank you so much for the opportunity to talk with you, Katie!

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